

## “Over the Counter” Doesn’t Mean It Can’t Cause Harm

COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS THAT CONTAIN NASAL DECONGESTANTS, ANTIHISTAMINES, COUGH SUPPRESSANTS, AND EXPECTORANTS ARE COMMONLY USED ALONE OR IN COMBINATION IN ATTEMPTS TO TEMPORARILY RELIEVE SYMPTOMS OF CONGESTION, RUNNY NOSE, AND COUGH ASSOCIATED WITH UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS IN CHILDREN AGED LESS THAN 2 YEARS. HOWEVER, DURING 2004-2005, 1,519 CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF TWO WERE TREATED IN U.S. EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS FOR ADVERSE EVENTS, INCLUDING OVERDOSES, ASSOCIATED WITH COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS.

AN INVESTIGATION CONDUCTED BY THE CDC (CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL) AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS (NAME) IDENTIFIED DEATHS OF THREE INFANTS LESS THAN 6 MONTHS IN 2005, FOR WHICH COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS WERE DETERMINED BY MEDICAL EXAMINERS OR CORONERS TO BE THE UNDERLYING CAUSE.

BECAUSE OF THE RISKS OF TOXICITY, PARENTS AND OTHER CAREGIVERS SHOULD NOT ADMINISTER COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS TO CHILDREN LESS THAN 6 MONTHS WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING THEIR HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER. PARENTS SHOULD ALWAYS FOLLOW THE PROVIDER'S INSTRUCTIONS PRECISELY TO AVOID OVERDOSE IN CHILDREN FROM MULTIPLE MEDICATIONS THAT CONTAIN THE SAME INGREDIENT. IN CHILDREN UNDER 2 YEARS, FDA APPROVAL OF THE USE OF OVER-THE-COUNTER COUGH AND COLD MEDICATIONS IS BASED ON REVIEW OF SAFETY AND EFFICACY DATA BY AN EXTERNAL ADVISORY REVIEW PANEL.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO REMEMBER THAT REGARDLESS OF THE CHILD’S AGE, OVER-THE-COUNTER COLD AND COUGH MEDICATIONS ARE SYMPTOMATIC MEDICATIONS. THEY MIGHT RELIEVE SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS, BUT THEY DO NOT AFFECT THE COURSE OF THE DISEASE. THEY CERTAINLY DO NOT “KILL” VIRUSES. AND, JUST BECAUSE THE MEDICINE IS AVAILABLE OVER THE COUNTER WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION DOESN’T MEAN THAT IT CAN’T CAUSE HARM IF TAKEN INCORRECTLY OR WITH OTHER MEDICATIONS.

MY ADVICE TO PARENTS IS TO ALWAYS USE THESE MEDICATIONS AS NEEDED (I.E. IF THE BABY CAN’T TAKE THE BREAST OR THE BOTTLE BECAUSE OF CONGESTION, OR IF THEY CAN’T SLEEP BECAUSE OF COUGH). NEVER USE THESE MEDICATIONS AROUND THE CLOCK (EVEN IN OLDER KIDS). ALWAYS FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR’S DIRECTIONS INCLUDING WHEN TO USE THEM AND HOW MUCH TO USE. NEVER MAKE A DECISION TO GIVE MORE MEDICATION IF THE DOSE PRESCRIBED IS NOT HELPING THE SYMPTOMS, AND NEVER ADD ANOTHER MEDICATION WITHOUT CHECKING FIRST WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF IT IS SAFE.

A PROVIDER IS ALWAYS ON-CALL AT SAMS CLINIC TO ANSWER QUESTIONS (CALL 263-4127 DAY OR NIGHT). ALSO IF YOU LIVE AT ZAMA, SAGAMIHARA OR SAGAMI DEPO, CALL POISON CONTROL (LESTER ER, OKINAWA) AT 115 FOR ANY CONCERNS.

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